

Animal Experimentation

Peter Singer: "All Animals are Equal"

Background: Utilitarianism

Singer is a utilitarian, which is a type of consequentialist theory.

Consequentialist theories all hold that the consequences are what make an action right or wrong.

One famous utilitarian, J.S. Mill, defined his ethical theory as the following:

- "Actions are right in proportion as they tend to produce happiness, wrong in proportion as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness."

So, ultimate good is to minimize unhappiness and maximize happiness

Background: Utilitarianism

But what needs further defining is that every utilitarian theory will need some theory of value.

That is, Utilitarians need to provide what constitutes "good", "bad" or "happiness", "unhappiness"

J.S. Mill definition, "By happiness is intended [*meant*] pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure."

Singer's theory of value is that "bad" or "unhappiness" is "pain or suffering".

Singer's main point and method

Singer argues that speciesism is morally analogous to racism and sexism.

Racism and sexism is wrong, thus speciesism is wrong.

Why is sexism and racism wrong?

Sexism and Racism is wrong because treating women and members of another race violates the principle of equality.

But what is meant by "equality"

- Obviously all people are not "equal" in talents, skills, and intellectual capacities.

"Equality" cannot be found in some factual study or some genetic study.

"The appropriate response to those who claim to have found evidence of genetically based differences in ability among the races or between the sexes is not to stick to the belief that the genetic explanation must be wrong, whatever evidence to the contrary may turn up; instead we should make it quite clear that the claim to equality does not depend on intelligence, moral capacity, physical strength, or similar matters of fact." (pg. 143)

Equality defined

"Equality is a moral idea, not an assertion of fact. There is no logically compelling reason for assuming that a factual difference in ability between two people justifies any difference in the amount of consideration we give to their needs and interests. *The principle of equality of human beings is not a description of an alleged actual equality among humans: it is a prescription of how we should treat human beings.*" (pg. 143)

Implication of the Principle of Equality

We need to take into account “the interests of the being, whatever those interest may be— [we] must, according to the principle of equality, be extended to all beings, back or white, masculine or feminine, human or nonhuman.” (143)

- E.g., “for children in America...we teach them to read”
- “Concern for the well-being of pigs may require no more than that we leave them with other pigs in a place where there is adequate food and room to run freely”

Singer claims a similar point is made in the 1850's by Sojourner Truth:

They Talk about this thing in the head; what do they call it? [Intellect,” whispered someone nearby.]

That's it. What's that got to do with women's rights or Negroes' rights? If my cup won't hold but a pint and your holds a quart, wouldn't you be mean not to let me have my little half-measure full?

What's the point?

What makes racism and sexism wrong, by analogy, is what makes speciesism wrong.

Speciesism: a prejudice or attitude of bias in favor of the interests of members of one's own species and against those of members of other species

If the basis of racism and sexism is not intelligence, then the basis of speciesism cannot be intelligence

If intelligence is not a criterion, then what is?

Can't we extend the argument so that it applies to rocks or amoeba?

No.

“The capacity for suffering and enjoyment is a *prerequisite for having interests at all*, a condition that must be satisfied before we can speak of interests in a meaningful way. It would be nonsense to say that it was not in the interests of a stone to be kicked along the road by a schoolboy.” (145)

Sentience is the criterion for interests

“If a being suffers there can be no moral justification for refusing to take that suffering into consideration. No matter what the nature of the being, the principle of equality requires that its suffering be counted equally with the like suffering—insofar as rough comparisons can be made—of any other being. If a being is not capable of suffering, or of experiencing enjoyment or happiness, there is nothing to be taken into account. So the limit of sentience... is the only defensible boundary of concern for the interests of others.” (145)

Summary of argument so far

“Racists violate the principle of equality by giving greater weight to the interest of members of their own race when there is a clash between their interests and the interests of those of another race. Sexists violate the principle of equality by favoring the interests of their own sex. Similarly, speciesists allow the interests of their own species to override the greater interests of members of other species. The pattern is identical in each case.” 145

How does this apply to Animal experimentation?

When are experiments on animals justifiable?

- Singer is not absolutist (he's a utilitarian)

What if a single animal experiment could save thousands of lives?
Is this morally permissible?

Are experimenters prepared to allow to experiment on an *orphaned* infant with irreversible brain damage?

These brain damaged infants presumably possess no morally relevant characteristic to a higher degree than adult nonhuman animals.

If experimenters think that their experiments are important enough to use animals, then their experiments would be important enough to experiment on orphaned, brain damaged infants.

When are experiments on animals justifiable?

Singer is not saying it is absolutely "NEVER"

"Torturing a human being is almost always wrong, but it is not absolutely wrong. If torture were the only way in which we could discover the location of a nuclear bomb hidden in a NYC basement and timed to go off within the hour, then torture would be justifiable." (148)

"Since a speciesist bias, like a racist bias, is unjustifiable, an experiment cannot be justifiable unless the experiment is so important that the use of a brain-damaged human would also be justifiable..."

Quick Recap of Singer

At the very least, for Singer, experiments on animals for commercial purposes should be banned.

At the very least, those experiments that are for medical 'purposes', but where there is no hard evidence that such experiments have any medical benefit, should be banned.

Does a normal human have the capacity for much greater suffering, and much greater enjoyment than a nonhuman animal?

If so, can this be a response to Singers argument?